

**AGENDA ITEM VII**

**REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF PROGRAM TERMINATION**

**NICHOLLS STATE UNIVERSITY**

**BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN MANUFACTURING ENGINEERING  
TECHNOLOGY**

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##### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

At its meeting of March 23, 2000, the Board of Regents acted as follows:

**Conditional approval is granted for the proposed B.S. program in Manufacturing Technology (CIP Code 15.0603) at Nicholls State University. Beginning June 1, 2000, and on the date every year thereafter until accreditation of the program has been granted by the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology, the University shall submit to the Commissioner of Higher Education a report updating efforts to address weaknesses and problematic areas identified by external consultants and the staff.**

The Board received annual progress reports from Nicholls as required above and directed the University to continue such reports until program accreditation had been achieved.

The excerpt from the AY 2002-03 staff summary which follows is pertinent:

**The program continues to grow in both enrollment and numbers of graduates. The University has been successful in attracting external funds to augment equipment. Industrial partnerships have been initiated and have proven to be helpful both in terms of monetary support and supplementary personnel.**

**Accreditation plans have been delayed until 2005. Faculty resources are not yet sufficient to meet ABET requirements. Campus leadership changes have also adversely affected the original timeline for program accreditation application. These barriers should be resolved soon and the University plans to submit a self-study in Spring 2005, with a subsequent on-site accreditation visit by Fall 2005. The staff notes that, given the date of original program approval, the University has until Fall 2005 to achieve appropriate accreditation for this program.**

Following is the staff summary of the fourth progress report for AY 2003-04, presented to the Regents in October 2005.

**The status of this program is not good. TAC/ABET accreditation of this program is mandated by Regents policy and must be achieved soon. Currently, the program does not meet basic faculty requirements for accreditation. As TAC/ABET requires a minimum of 3.0 FTE faculty; Nicholls has only 1.5 FTE faculty with a likely loss of 1.0 FTE due to retirement in the near future. The program therefore faces a personnel crisis. Nicholls must move swiftly to correct this situation if there is to be any possibility of attaining TAC/ABET accreditation by the Regents deadline.**

**Student numbers are marginal. An undergraduate program in its fourth year of operation should have significantly more than 35-40 majors. Using a commonly accepted formula, approximately 10-15% of enrollees should graduate per year. At current enrollment levels, this program would only produce 4-6 graduates per year – well below the Regents minimum of 8 per year. To correct this situation, the University may have to consider recruiting outside its traditional service area. As this is the only such program in Louisiana, prospects for significant student interest elsewhere in the state should be good. Dr. Carroll Falcon, University Provost, has recently spoken with staff to express his concerns about the program's future. He fully realizes that best efforts will be required to address significant weaknesses.**

**Another progress report must be required. It is critical that the 2005 progress report include clear and compelling evidence that the University has implemented successful corrective strategies.**

Subsequently, in October 2005, after reviewing the 2004-05 program progress report, the staff met with the Vice President for Academic Affairs at Nicholls State University. It was mutually agreed that the University would request immediate termination due to a lack of student interest and inadequate resources.

Accordingly, in January 2006, after comprehensive review of all non-accredited programs statewide, the Regents acted as follows:

**The Board of Regents hereby terminates the B.S. program in Manufacturing Engineering Technology program (CIP Code 15.0603) at Nicholls State University, effective immediately.**

In March 2006, Dr. Falcon contacted staff to indicate that industrial representatives in the Nicholls' service area were interested in continuing this program, despite past difficulties. The staff responded by citing **Academic Affairs Policy 2.10 - Reconsideration of a Terminated Program** which states:

**The Commissioner of Higher Education must receive a request for reconsideration from the appropriate management board within ninety (90) days of the day on which the Board of Regents votes to terminate the program.**

Because time was short, Dr. Falcon requested, and received, a thirty day extension (until May 2006) for an application of appeal.

In May 2006, the University requested and received administrative approval from the UL System for appeal. This action was confirmed by full Board action in June 2006. In its appeal, the University is requesting continuation of the program for a period of three years, during which time it intends to achieve ABET accreditation for the MET program with the assistance of interested industry.

## **STAFF ANALYSIS**

### **1. Need**

The institution provided copies of several letters from local businesses expressing concern about termination of the MET program. Industry support is also evidenced by commitments to promotion funds, scholarships and provision of funds for hiring or employees to serve as adjunct faculty.

If the request for suspension of termination for three years is granted, the MET program has specified several approaches that will be utilized to build and support the program.

- a. Formation of a new Industrial Advisory Board;
- b. Engagement of industrial partner to provide adjunct instructors;
- c. Establishment of a \$25,000/yr promotion fund; and
- d. Raising \$100,000 to support infrastructure and achieve national recognition for the program.

### **2. Students**

Nicholls indicates that the enrollment projections in the original MET proposal were overestimated. Follow-up visits to area high schools revealed that very few high school students were aware of the program's existence two years after its implementation, despite recruiting visits to those schools. Numbers of declared MET majors has not been robust. Numbers of graduates are shown in the table which follows.

MET Graduates	AY 2002-03	AY 2003-04	AY 2004-05	AY 2005-06	AY 2006-07	TOTAL
	6	1	3	7	8*	25

\* Anticipated

The institution states that it will increase enrollment by 20% per year for each of three consecutive years by various means such as:

- a. Explore a 2+2 program with state community colleges;
- b. Recruit by having students, faculty and industry representatives visit high schools; and
- c. Increase awareness of the program by student involvement with JETS TEAMS competition, Science Olympiad and other competitions

More specific recruitment objectives planned for the next three years include:

- a. Faculty, recent graduates, current students and industrial partners bi-annual visits to area high schools;
- b. Mailing of program CDs to area high schools, community colleges;
- c. Production of a CD publicizing the Tractor Competition and submission to new media; and
- d. Participation in student competitions including self-developed competitions, such as underwater, remote crane, etc.

Five- year enrollment projections, shown in the table which follows, were derived by a realistic process and could produce the minimal number of completers required for program maintenance:

	<b>AY 06-07</b>	<b>AY 07-08</b>	<b>AY 08-09</b>	<b>AY 09-10</b>	<b>AY 10-11</b>
<b>ENROLLMENT</b>					
# End previous school yr	30	30	38	46	60
# Recruits	15	25	30	40	40
# At beginning of yr	45	55	68	86	100
# lost to attrition	10	11	14	18	22
# Graduates	5	6	8	8	9
# End current school yr	30	38	46	60	69

### **3. Faculty**

Two full-time faculty are currently assigned to the MET program. A course rotation schedule provided by the institution indicates that MET classes will be covered through the summer of 2009 by utilizing adjunct faculty to teach up to five courses per semester. The Request for Reconsideration notes that local industry is willing to provide funds for hiring adjunct faculty or employees as adjunct instructors for some of the courses. Proposed individuals are well qualified, with SACS/CoC credentials.

The staff observes that one of the technical classes is offered at the Louisiana Technical College-La Fourche campus in Thibodaux while another is offered at L. E. Fletcher Technical Community College in Houma. This arrangement maximizes utilization of facilities, equipment and faculty.

### **4. Programmatic Accreditation**

A time-line for achieving accreditation by Technology Accreditation Committee of ABET was provided by the Manufacturing Engineering Technology program. Following staff consultation with ABET personnel, a revised schedule, shown following, was developed.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Description</b>
Fall 2006	Consultant Visit (NSU hires former TAC commissioner)	A consultant will assess the program in a manner consistent with ABET and direct our activities to be successful during the ABET/TAC visit.

Spring, 2007	Depending upon the Consultant's report, Nicholls would either:	1. Abandon plans for accreditation and request termination of program; or 2. Notify ABET of its intent to pursue accreditation and conduct self-study. A one-year period will be utilized to conduct a self-assessment of the program and correct deficiencies before an official TAC/ABET visit.
January 2008	Submit application for accreditation with self-study.	
Fall 2008	ABET visit in the Fall of 2008	TAC visits NSU campus to assess program and university infrastructure/support.
August, 2009	ABET Committee makes decision	MET program responds appropriately to the decision and corrects any deficiencies found. If program is approved for accreditation, the effective date is retroactive to the time of the site visit.

## **5. Evidence of Support**

Commitments from four area businesses has been explained previously. However, Nicholls State University itself did not offer substantive evidence of institutional support for the maintenance of the MET program, which might have included a commitment to hire an additional full or part-time faculty, hiring a TAC consultant to visit the campus to assess its viability as a candidate for TAC/ABET accreditation, and/or funds or mechanisms for recruiting or retaining additional students for the program.

## **STAFF SUMMARY**

### **Need**

Letters from industry endorsing re-institution of the program were provided. However, no specific evidence of need for graduates of the program was provided, nor promises given that program graduates would be hired .

### **Faculty**

Not until fall semester of 2005 were two full-time faculty dedicated to the MET program. There is no evidence of a course release for the program director to allow for administrative duties . While TAC/ABET has relaxed its criteria for accreditation from requiring a minimum three FT faculty to "outcomes based criteria" which no longer prescribe a specific number of faculty, the staff opines that a cadre of full-time faculty is necessary to provide continuity, advise and nurture students and to grow a program. The course rotation schedule provided by the program indicates that five courses are to be offered by adjuncts each fall semester, plus an additional course is offered off-campus at LTC-LaFourche. In the spring semesters, four courses are offered by adjuncts plus an additional course is offered at Fletcher Technical Community College in Houma. It is that staff's opinion that this schedule is over-reliant on adjunct forces and supports the need for a third full-time faculty.

## **Students**

One industrial partner has committed \$4,000 annually for scholarships for students enrolling in the MET program. Advertisement of these scholarships should attract qualified students into the program while raising awareness of the program in the region. However, students are not likely to flock into a program that has languished since implementation, was then terminated, and now is being maintained in a probationary manner for the next three years. Considerable effort will be needed to overcome this poor history to convince students to enroll in the program.

Commitments from industry totaling fifteen thousand dollars per year for promoting the program have been obtained for an unspecified period. Recruiting plans are optimistic and the staff is concerned that the two full-time faculty who carry full teaching loads, plus administrative and advising duties, will be hard-pressed to find adequate time for recruitment efforts.

## **Accreditation**

Communication with personnel at the Accrediting Board for Engineering and Technology suggests that the MET program could achieve the Technology Accreditation Committee endorsement for accreditation within a reasonable time only if adequate support is present. An on-site visit by a former TAC commissioner is the only reliable means of determining the viability of Nicholls' program as a candidate for Board of Regents mandated ABET accreditation.

## **Final Comments**

The staff is not optimistic that this program can meet Regents requirements for both quality and student numbers without significant and sustained University support. An initial step in that regard would be a commitment by the University to engage a TAC consultant for this fall and to agree now to abide by the results of that visit, including necessary commitments for additional resources funded through sustained revenue streams. Thereafter, if University support is evidenced, then a three-year period for attainment of ABET-TAC accreditation, with appropriate annual progress reports, should be imposed.

As additional supporting materials may be provided by the University at the August meeting, the staff does not elect to make a recommendation at this time.